

DUMBARTON OAKS

The near East in the Hellenistic and Roman Times

Author(s): Michael Ivanovich Rostovtzeff

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 1, Dumbarton Oaks Inaugural Lectures, November 2nd and 3rd, 1940 (1941), pp. 25+27-40

Published by: [Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1291038>

Accessed: 07/03/2013 07:27

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

THE NEAR EAST IN THE HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN TIMES

MICHAEL IVANOVICH ROSTOVITZ

I HAVE been asked to sketch for you the social and economic conditions of the Near East at the time of the late Roman Empire.¹ I am afraid that the special topic of this symposium – the early development and diffusion of Byzantine art – is not very closely related to the subject of my talk. I cannot confidently speak of social and economic conditions as a *background* for the evolution of other manifestations of human life at any time or in any place. Social and economic conditions are as much aspects of human life as art, or any other field of human endeavor and human creative power. We may speak of inter-relations between these various manifestations, but not of dependence of one on the other. None of them may properly be spoken of as a background for the others. Nevertheless for a student of the history of art it may be of interest to know, in general outline, under what social and economic conditions lived those who created the early Byzantine art and those for whom it was created. It may lead to a better understanding of some traits of their mentality and of their relation to their environment.

Let me first define more closely what I mean by the Near East and what aspects of its social and economic evolution I regard as fundamental. I refer to the Oriental part of the so-called Hellenistic world – Asia Minor, Egypt, and the Syrian countries, the last closely connected with their Iranian and Semitic neighbors. I do not include in my discussion the heart of the Byzantine Empire, the Balkan peninsula. The outstanding phenomenon in the social and economic life of this part of the civilized world is to my mind the inter-relation and the inter-penetration of Hellenism and Orientalism. This phenomenon is but imperfectly known. What we know about Asia Minor we owe in part to scattered and meagre literary evidence, but chiefly to the archaeological material, written and unwritten, which comes from the ruins of Greek cities, of villages, of scattered farms, and from graveyards. Much better is our information about Egypt. Thousands of documents written on papyrus, in addition to the ruins of ancient temples, cities, and villages, and to the few inscriptions, permit us to look deep into the most intimate affairs of its population and into the inter-relations of the ruling classes – Greeks and Romans

¹ The sketch which I offer to the reader in the following pages is based on my two books: *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 1926 (translations with additions in German [1929] and in Italian [1933]; a new English edition is in preparation) and *Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, in course of publication.

— and the mass of natives. Least known are the Syrian and Iranian lands, which until recently have not been so thoroughly studied nor so systematically excavated as Asia Minor and Egypt.

It is therefore not an easy task to trace the social and economic evolution of these countries in general and especially to formulate its essential traits in a brief talk. This task is made still more difficult by the familiar fact that never in its long history did the Near East form from cultural, social, and economic points of view a homogeneous unit. Even when it was temporarily a political unit — I mean at the time of the Achaemenian Persian Empire, of Alexander and his immediate successors, and during the long domination of the Romans — it was split into larger and smaller units, each one having its own peculiar characteristics. Egypt, Asia Minor, the Syrian and Iranian lands, are and always have been as different from each other as they were different from the more homogeneous Latin West. In addition, each of these units, except Egypt, was split into many smaller units, each with its own highly individualized way of life.

Let me begin with *Asia Minor*, the Anatolian lands. Visitors to this part of the ancient world know its Western coast, studded with Greek cities. They bring back with them the impression that Asia Minor was a country of Greek cities, not very different in their culture from the Greek islands and the mainland of Greece. It is true that the urbanization of Asia Minor after the Greek pattern started early — long before the time of Persian domination. The best known cities of Asia Minor are almost all Greek settlements of the time of the great Greek colonization, such for example as Ephesus, Smyrna, and Priene. This process, moreover, although interrupted for several centuries, was resumed with different aims and by different methods by the successors of Alexander, especially by the Seleucids and the Attalids, with whom vied to a certain extent the minor Hellenistic monarchies of Asia Minor: Bithynia, Pontus, Cappadocia. While the early Greek colonization affected exclusively the coastal regions of Asia Minor, the Hellenistic rulers penetrated deep into the interior, creating new Greek cities and village-like military colonies and encouraging the gradual transformation of native towns into Greek urban centers. Nor did this process stop during the period of Roman domination. Pompey, for example, contributed greatly to the urbanization of the Pontus, and several Roman emperors continued the policy of their Hellenistic predecessors.

Thus Asia Minor appears even to those modern travellers who penetrate into its interior, as it appeared long before to those citizens of the Roman Empire whose voice we sometimes hear, as a country of hundreds of cities, as a section of the Greek city-world, more brilliant and spectacular than

the decaying cities of the mainland of Greece and of the islands, but not very different from them as regards political structure, social, intellectual and religious life, and economic activity. And yet this appearance was fallacious. Asia Minor was only superficially urbanized and Hellenized. An intelligent traveller of ancient or modern times following the inland roads of Asia Minor could readily see that the Greek cities, the Greek religion, the Greek mode of life, the Greek mentality, formed only a brilliant superstructure on age-old foundations of a plainer kind. The upper classes of Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor were Greek, but the working classes remained Anatolian, as in fact they still are. By the term Anatolian I mean something different from Greek, but I do not imply by its use a cultural unity. In Roman times the population of the interior of Asia Minor remained as diversified in mode of life, religion, and language as at the time of the Hittites, Phrygians, Lydians and Persians.

The economic backbone of Asia Minor was not the landowners, shop-owners, merchants and intellectuals, i.e. the bourgeoisie of the cities only, but the industrial working class, organized in guilds, consisting in large part of men of native origin engaged in industry from time immemorial, and still more the tillers of the soil, the millions of Anatolian peasants living in their thousands of villages. To these must be added the thousands of rude shepherds and robbers in the mountains.

Of the Anatolian city workman and his guilds we know little. Better known is the Anatolian peasant. In the late Roman times he appears slightly Hellenized. At that time most of the villagers probably spoke a broken Greek; their documents — manifestations of their corporative life — were written in Greek, and so were their epitaphs. No wonder. Greek was the official language of the country for centuries. Even their peculiar religious experiences, their dedications to their own gods, their confessions, their prayers, their charms, they recorded (or someone did it for them) in Greek, and in these records their gods appear under Greek names.

This however was only the surface, a thin veneer of Greek; the core of their life remained Anatolian. The methods of cultivation of the land hardly changed in the course of centuries, and the same is true of industry. More important is the fact that the relation of the peasant to the land remained the same as before. Most of the Anatolian peasants were born and died in their villages, for generations tilling the same piece of land. They were practically bound to their village and their pieces of land, not by laws and regulations only, but by immemorial usage as well. Their juridical status toward the land which they tilled changed from time to time. In the pre-Persian and Persian times the peasant was a bondsman, a serf

or even a slave of his overlord, be it the gods worshipped in the temples, the kings, or the feudal landholders. Under the Hellenistic rulers and under the Romans religious, legal, and traditional bondage gradually disappeared, to reappear again in the changed form of the Roman colonate in the third and fourth centuries of our era. But whatever the legal relations were, psychologically the Anatolian peasant, even in late Hellenistic and early Roman times, remained tied to his land, to his village. He regarded himself, and was, a part of the land; a bondsman to it by tradition, by sentiment, by religion. His life was centered on his work and on his gods. His temporary masters changed from time to time. He obeyed them all without demur: payed taxes and all sorts of supplementary contributions, often heavy and unbearable, submitted to the jurisdiction of imperial and city magistrates, never objected to his sons being drafted as recruits for the imperial army, even though some of them never returned to their native village. But his real lord was the god of his village, and it was in the priests of the village temple that he had full confidence. It was to them that he turned in time of distress and emotional crisis, in the domestic affairs which affected him more than the destinies of the great political unit to which he belonged.

The picture I have drawn may appear somewhat fanciful and poorly documented. We know little of the villages and the rural temples of Asia Minor. None of them has been thoroughly excavated. But some documents of the first importance have been found on the surface, and some have been uncovered in partial and haphazard excavations. They speak an eloquent language. Though they are rare, their rarity is merely a matter of chance: no historian has the right to be blinded by the abundant material which comes from the cities and to neglect these casual but illuminating stray documents, reflections of the soul of the millions of Anatolian peasants who very rarely had the opportunity and the means to express their feelings in written form.

Some of my fellow historians may say that to a historian the feelings and the conditions of life of millions of passive human beings, a kind of human cattle, have no importance. The leaders, the active few, matter: the government, the civilized bourgeoisie of the cities. This I regard as a mistake, especially for a historian of social and economic conditions, of religion and art. It was from the villages of Anatolia that a new conception of religion and art took its start. The majority of the supporters of Christianity in the later times were villagers, and the currents which in the late Roman Empire transformed the traditional classical art came not exclusively from above, from the cities but also from below, from the villages.

Different was the social and economic aspect of *Egypt*. From time immemorial this rich land had been a country of intensive agricultural and industrial production and of strong religious feelings, which determined the whole of the life of the population. The gods were the supreme masters and owners in Egypt. For them the millions of peasants toiled and sweated. The representative, the manifestation of the gods on earth, was the king. Egypt was the household of the king. Under his paternal, divine care stood the whole of the population. The king and his assistants in civil, military, and religious affairs directed the life of their subjects, the peasants and artisans in Egypt.

With the conquest of Alexander and the establishment of the rule of the Macedonian Ptolemies, with their Macedonian and Greek followers, the situation became more complicated. A lasting dualism arose. The Ptolemies endeavored to demonstrate to the population that they were the legitimate successors of its native kings, like them sons of Ammon Ra and his representatives on earth. They took pains never to hurt the religious feelings of their subjects. They repaired the ancient temples of the Egyptian gods and built new and gorgeous abodes for them, large and beautiful sanctuaries of the traditional form and style. In them they appeared in the same garb and engaged in the same religious rites as their predecessors. Like them they were crowned on their accession in Memphis.

And yet in all this the people of Egypt must have recognized an element of fraud, of deceit. The Ptolemies were not Egyptians. They were and remained, in language, mentality, and civilization, Greeks. They were surrounded by Greeks who managed on their behalf and under their direction the economic and social life of the millions of Egyptian peasants and artisans and watched carefully the economic life of the clergy. The domestic, paternal care of the kings of the past was transformed into a system of well planned, state-controlled economy, rigid and logical, which was managed by foreigners. The government and the ruling class, though outwardly devoted to Egyptian gods, had their own gods and their own temples, their own priests and their own religious ceremonies. Moreover, the fiscal pressure in the form of minute state control became much stronger than before and weighed heavily on the toiling population.

No wonder that the Ptolemies were never fully acknowledged by the lower classes of the native population as their own kings, in spite of sincere endeavors and far-reaching concessions to the clergy and the upper classes of the natives. Their policy in the eyes of the working classes never became "royal." It was in fact and remained in many respects colonial, and therefore oppressive and hateful to the majority of the natives. This

led to violent reactions of the “natives,” to ever-renewed “rebellions,” which were suppressed with a strong hand. The country remained split into two parts: the active masters — the king, with his associates, the propertied classes, consisting of Greeks and Hellenized natives, and the subjects — for the most part passive, peasants and artisans who never became Hellenized, though many of them were forced to learn the Greek language. For these last their real master and their ultimate refuge was still the god, whose will was interpreted by a numerous and well organized clergy. The weaker and less efficient the central government became (due in part to the gradual degeneration of the all-pervading system of state control) the greater grew the importance of the masses and the authority and wealth of the priests in the life of the Ptolemaic states.

This dualism, expressed in all manifestations of life, was inherited by the Romans. They did nothing to unite the two layers of the population. In this respect they had, in comparison with the Ptolemies, nothing new to add, except that they were less ready to tolerate any sign of independence, especially in the economic sphere, of the bodies of Egyptian priests, and they ruthlessly suppressed the rebellious actions of the working classes. Nor was the situation of these last improved. It is true that the pressure of state control was in many respects less strict and therefore less resented, but the fiscal requirements of the government became more severe than those of the Ptolemies and the method of exaction more ruthless and more mechanical. After all, Egypt was for the Ptolemies their own kingdom and to some extent, especially for the later ones, their own country, while for the Roman emperors it was a mere source of grain and money. In much this condition Egypt passed into the hands of the Byzantine Empire.

It is far more difficult to trace the main outlines of the social and economic life of what we call the “*Syrian*” *lands*. Geographically and economically Egypt was a unit. The Syrian countries, on the contrary, like Asia Minor, were a mosaic: the commercial and industrial cities of the Mediterranean coast in Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine, with their rich and fertile territories, their cornfields and their gardens; the plains, mountains and hills of North and South Syria, including Palestine, some parts of this area studded with cities each one in possession of an extensive “territory,” well watered and excellently cultivated; the fertile fringes of cultivable land along the Middle Tigris and the Euphrates, full of cities and villages; the fabulously rich alluvial region of Babylonia between the lower courses of the two rivers; and finally the Syrian and Arabian desert,

the abode of nomadic Arabs with their large flocks of sheep and goats and their herds of camels.

At the time when these regions, after a long period of Persian domination, came in touch with and became dependent on the Macedonians and Greeks they had behind them centuries of civilized, highly developed and locally differing life; in Sumeria and Babylonia, in the regions settled by the Hurrites and the Assyrians, in the coastal cities of Syria, Phoenicia and Palestine, in Palestine, in the hills beyond the Jordan, in the Syrian and Arabian deserts with their flourishing oases.

One of the peculiarities of this vast area from the economic point of view was the caravan trade, which plied between the various regions and states of the area under consideration, bringing goods from India and South Arabia, the destination of which was for the most part the Western and Northern world. Many of the cities of the Syrian lands, centers of agriculture, grazing, and industry, became still richer as stations and terminals of the great caravan roads.

Though different in their social and economic aspect, the various parts of the Syrian world in the pre-Persian time had much in common. They all were ruled by kings and priests. In all of them the upper classes of the population lived in well organized, fortified cities; large areas of those cities were occupied by the temples of the gods with their numerous, rich, and influential clergy. All were important centers of trade, industry, and banking. Their population was highly mobile and enterprising. In all of them, under the guidance of the gods and kings, peasants and artisans were at work, and, as in Egypt, they were in a sense part of the immense households of their spiritual and secular rulers.

With the Persians and especially with Alexander began a new period in the life of the countries under review. New foreign elements were introduced into the life of the Syrian lands, first the Persian overlords and their agents and then the Macedonian king, the Macedonian government and army, and the Greek and Macedonian cities and military settlements, first created in small numbers by Alexander and rapidly multiplied by his successors the Seleucids. The Greek element was not evenly distributed over the whole of the Seleucid kingdom. Some regions, like Northern Syria and the Syrian coast and upper Mesopotamia, were studded with Greek urban settlements, while in others they occurred more rarely. But in all sections of Alexander's empire the Greek settlements and the Greek type of administration were long-lived and tenacious, even after parts of the Seleucid Empire came again under the domination of Iranian overlords, this time the Parthian kings, or asserted their political independence.

In the early Seleucid times, however, and in the later period of the Seleucid Empire, the centers of Greek life, numerous as they were, constituted a superstructure, a new storey added to the ancient zikkurat of Oriental life. These centers kept their Greek identity jealously, and were unable and perhaps unwilling to assimilate to Hellenism large groups of natives. As in Egypt, it was only the higher class of the natives which was gradually, and in many cases superficially, Hellenized, attracted by the privileges connected with the status of a Hellene, of a member of the governing class. The masses, the artisans and peasants, still retained their ancient life, their ancestral religion, their Oriental mentality. No wonder that under such conditions Orientalism in the Hellenistic time remained strong in the Syrian lands. Under favorable circumstances even the reverse process would set in, and Orientalization replaced Hellenization in some but superficially Hellenized parts of Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Iran.

This fact is demonstrated by the history of those areas of the Seleucid kingdom which either were conquered by the Parthians or seceded from the Seleucids after a longer or shorter struggle. An illustration may be found for example in the history of Dura-Europos, one of the early Macedonian colonies on the Middle Euphrates, which has been systematically excavated by Yale University. It was laid out and built about 300 B.C. as a typical Greek city, with Greek fortifications of stone and brick, a stone citadel, streets laid out on the Hippodamian plan, a spacious agora of a pure Greek type, and temples of Greek gods. In the late Hellenistic times and still more when the city passed under the rule of the Parthian Arsacids its aspect began to change rapidly. Its outline remained Greek, but its general aspect was thoroughly Orientalized. In the original Greek temples the gods retained their Greek names, but they now became Oriental deities worshipped in the Oriental fashion. When new temples were built to these and other deities, with Greek names but of purely Oriental character, their arrangement and architecture were entirely Oriental. One of the most striking illustrations of this process of Orientalization is the agora, the marketplace, of Dura, excavated and carefully studied by Dr. F. E. Brown of Yale University. We can follow step by step the transformation of the original Greek marketplace into an Oriental bazaar. From an open square surrounded by shops it was changed into an area of dark narrow streets lined with shops, behind and connected with which stood private houses and spacious Oriental khans. The same is true of the social and economic life of the city. Religion, family life, dress, ways of living, and art, as represented in the numerous sculptures and paintings of Dura, became Orientalized. And yet the descendants of the original Macedonian

colonists never gave up their claim to being Greeks. Their names remained Greek and so did their language and education.

A second example is Palestine and Jerusalem under Antiochus IV and later, so splendidly illustrated by the books of the Maccabees and by Flavius Josephus. It is well known that under the rule of the Ptolemies and under Antiochus III the upper class of the Jews became Hellenized, in language, mentality, mode of life, and even religion. When however Antiochus IV, with the support of the Hellenized Jews, endeavored to carry this development to a logical conclusion and to transform Jerusalem into one of the many Antiochs of his kingdom, he met staunch resistance, not from the Jewish bourgeoisie, but from the peasants and artisans of the country, who finally asserted the independence of Judaea. What happened in Palestine took place also in several Greek cities with territories inhabited by natives, Europos, Edessa, Carrhae, and others, where the constitution of the Greek *polis* was changed into the dynastic rule of a family, often of Oriental origin. As a final example of this persistence, and one which is rarely quoted in this connection, I would instance that vital feature of the economic life of Syria, the caravan trade. This trade was never Hellenized. It retained its ancient Oriental features. The Greeks never controlled it economically. Palmyra and Petra show that it remained in the hands of Oriental merchants.

In the course of time the Seleucids were replaced in the Syrian lands by the Romans. After Pompey, Syria became one of the Roman provinces. From the social and economic point of view, this change of overlords was of no great significance. The structure of the country, the leading features of its social and economic life changed very little. But in the atmosphere of peace, which replaced the political anarchy of the late Seleucid period, Syria became exceedingly rich through the activity of its thrifty population. Agricultural production grew rapidly, industry flourished, caravan trade increased in volume and importance by leaps and bounds.

In the social and economic sphere the Romans took up the work where the Seleucids had left it. No important new centers of Greek life were added to the pre-existing ones, but all of these grew rapidly in size and prosperity. As in the time of the Seleucids, the cities remained Greek; in fact their Greek character became even more strongly emphasized.

Nevertheless, even under the Romans the Syrian Greeks were Greeks of a special type. They show unmistakable traits of Orientalization, especially in their religious life. Many gods whom they worshipped were known under Greek names, but they were in fact, just as in Parthian Dura, Oriental deities. Their temples, enlarged and embellished in Roman times,

like those of Baalbek, Hierapolis-Bambyce, and Gerasa in the Transjordan, presented a Greek aspect. But their general design was not Greek and the worship within their courts was essentially Oriental.

If the Oriental influence was felt by the city bourgeoisie, what shall we say of the countryside? In the thousands of Syrian villages the façade, the outer aspect, the organization, the public buildings, and the temples were Greek, but the core remained Oriental: witness the persistence with which the country population held fast to its ancestral religion.

While the old Greek centers of Syria, the cities and villages around Antioch, those in the so-called Decapolis (the Transjordan), and in parts of Northern Syria, assumed increasingly a Greek aspect, the borderlands on the frontier of the Roman province of Syria were gradually adopting a new type of life and a new social, economic, and cultural order. This process began in the Hellenistic times. I have cited the example of Dura. It developed further under Roman domination. For a hundred years after the conquest under Marcus Aurelius Dura was included within the Roman Empire and became an important Roman military center with a strong garrison. Nevertheless there was no such thing as a re-Hellenization or a Romanization of Dura. Except for the Roman camp and for some unimportant features of the architectural aspect of Dura, the city remained in Roman times what it had been before, a city *sui generis*, an odd mixture of Greek, Semitic, and Iranian elements.

Nor was Dura an exception. The same mixture appears in the proud city of Palmyra, the large and wealthy neighbor of Dura, the almost undisputed mistress of the transit caravan trade of the second and third centuries A.D. Palmyra, an Arab settlement in the Hellenistic times, did not become a regular city until the time of Augustus. From this time on it stood first under the Roman protectorate and later became one of the provincial cities of the Roman Empire: first a Roman *municipium* and later a Roman colony. A first glance at the ruins of the city, at its temples, streets, marketplaces, private houses, and gorgeous tombs adorned with sculptures and paintings, conveys the idea that Palmyra was not unlike the other large cities of the Roman province of Syria, such as Antioch on the Orontes or Apamea or one of the thoroughly Hellenized Phoenician cities like Berytus — a Greek city with a slight exotic, i.e. Oriental, touch. And yet this impression is misleading. In fact Palmyra never was a Greek city. It was an enlarged Dura, more Hellenized and slightly Romanized outwardly, more Semitic inwardly. Her temples are all dedicated to Oriental gods and goddesses, her imposing tower-tombs, like similar ones in Dura, are products of a peculiar architecture, reflections of ideas about life and

death utterly different from those which were characteristic of the Greeks. If we look at the thousands of inscriptions found in Palmyra we see that most of them are written in the native Palmyrene form of the Aramaic language, and that they speak of men, the leaders in the social and economic life of the city, Semitic in religion and with Semitic names. In their tombs, they are represented in a dress in which the Iranian elements predominate, while the Greek and Semitic characteristics are of secondary importance. I have no time to give you a fuller picture of Palmyra, but I may add, that the difference between Palmyra and Antioch or Apamea was of the same kind as that between Nabataean Petra, the Arabian Palmyra, and Gerasa in the Transjordan.

In fact a new type of social, economic, and cultural life was in formation in late Hellenistic times and under the early Roman Empire on the borders of the Roman province of Syria. It was neither Greek nor Oriental. To characterize it briefly, it was a synthesis of these two elements, identical with what we find in the early Parthian Empire, and later in the art at least of the Sassanians.

This new Hellenistic Orientalism was not humble or abject. It regarded itself as the equal of the Graeco-Roman world, as the heir to the great Seleucid Empire with the emphasis on its Oriental aspects. The Iranian Parthians, the least Hellenized of the neighbors of Rome, were the first to assert this claim, after Mithridates the Great, exponent of the same idea and representative of a similar Graeco-Iranian and Anatolian civilization, had failed in his endeavor to put an end to Roman domination in the East. After some spectacular successes in the time of the Roman civil wars of the first century B.C., the Parthians failed also. Under Augustus and his successors and especially after the victorious military expeditions of Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, and the Severi, it seemed that Parthia, a vassal state of Rome, would soon be reduced to the position of one of the border provinces of Rome, like Eastern Syria and Mesopotamia. A final victory of Hellenism and Romanism in the whole of the Hellenistic East, the former empire of Seleucus and his immediate successors, seemed assured.

This victory was jeopardized, however, by the *events of the stormy third century*. Political and social anarchy reigned in the whole of the Roman Empire. It was shaken to its very foundations. The Oriental element in the Near East took advantage of this state of affairs. Parthia, which gradually lost the slight veneer of Hellenism spread over her political, social, and cultural structure in the Hellenistic and early Roman period, was succeeded by Sassanian Persia, strongly Iranian in her faith and in her

civilization. It was no longer a question of extending Roman power and Graeco-Roman civilization to the Iranian East. It was Iran which now attacked the Roman Empire in an attempt to restore the glorious Achaemenian Empire.

The example of Sassanian Persia was followed by the semi-Semitic borderlands of the Roman Empire. Palmyra, mistress of the caravan trade, the most vital of the economic forces of the East, took the lead. Odenath and after him Zenobia, taking advantage of the Roman civil war, brought into being an ephemeral Graeco-Oriental Empire, the dream of the great predecessor of Zenobia, the famous Cleopatra, consort of Antony. In opposition to the Achaemenian dream of Sassanian Persia, Zenobia endeavored to revive the Seleucid state, or better, to transform Palmyra into an Oriental Rome.

But Rome was too strong, even in this critical period of her life, to succumb either to the Sassanids or to Zenobia. The Palmyrene Empire was crushed by the Danubian legions of Aurelian, and the Sassanian advance was stopped. But the events of the third century foreshadowed the future of the Near East, its further gradual emancipation from Hellenism and Romanism.

After the incessant wars and self-extinction of the third century the *unity of the Roman Empire* was at length reestablished by *Diocletian* and his successors. With quiet and order a new prosperity came to the Near East. It is splendidly illustrated for the Syrian lands by archaeological evidence, the splendid ruins of hundreds of cities, churches and villas of the late Roman and Byzantine times. In the course of events the Roman state was divided into two parts, the Eastern and the Western Empire, with deep changes in the general structure of each. The outward aspect of the late Roman Empire may remind us of the Orient; its social and economic structure may appear to us more similar to that of the Oriental and Hellenistic monarchies of the past than to the conditions of the early Roman Empire. After the reforms of Diocletian and Constantine the new aristocracy and bureaucracy of the Roman Empire as well as the church became a direct governing agency over the masses of the population. The Graeco-Roman cities and their bourgeoisie were not dead, but they played a secondary, subordinate rôle. They became servants and agents of the state; they lost much of their economic and social freedom. Like the working classes they became in a large degree bound to the state, tools and instruments in the hands of the ruling class headed by the emperor. The Ptolemaic state-controlled system seems to have come back again in changed form.

Does however the reform of Diocletian and Constantine and the subsequent development mean a victory for Orientalism? I do not think so. Orientalization is in my mind not the term which explains the momentous changes mentioned above. These changes were dictated by necessity, by the natural endeavor of the emperors to safeguard and to protect the Roman state and the Graeco-Roman civilization shattered to their very foundations by the anarchy of the third century, by the general depopulation and impoverishment of the Roman Empire created by this anarchy, and by the fierce attacks of the neighbors of Rome. No other way was open to Diocletian and Constantine and to their successors. In following it they were not guided by the Hellenistic past long dead, nor influenced by the Oriental traditions which were dominant in Sassanian Persia. The Byzantine Empire was the direct heir of the Roman Empire, not a resurrection of the Oriental empires. Its spirit, its civilization, its mentality, remained Graeco-Roman. The late Roman emperors never succumbed to Orientalism except in minor details. They combatted it, rather, with all the strength at their disposal. Under their rule a new spell of Hellenization and urbanization swept over the Near East, and a renaissance of Greek creative activity took place in Asia Minor, in Syria, and in Egypt.

In their Hellenizing policy the Byzantine Emperors were successful so far as Asia Minor was concerned. The combined efforts of the church and of the civil and military government, the creation of the "themes" and the concomitant transformation of the *coloni* of Asia Minor into free peasants, carried out by Heraclius, contributed very much to the further Hellenization of the Anatolian peasants and to their loyal devotion to the Byzantine Empire. Yet even in Anatolia the Oriental background remained strong, and this background is responsible for the later success of the Turks in wresting this part of the Byzantine Empire from the Byzantine rulers.

Different was the situation in the Syrian lands and in Egypt. All the efforts of the Byzantine Emperors to Hellenize and to assimilate this part of their empire failed. The antinomy between Orientalism and Occidentalism was not eliminated. Their peculiar hybrid Graeco-Oriental civilization was still alive and thriving, and not only on the periphery of the Byzantine Empire. Witness the lasting antagonism between the central government in Constantinople and the Eastern sections of the Empire, an antagonism which is manifest in the course of political events and has been so often emphasized by modern students of Byzantine history. Another symptom of the same antagonism between East and West, closely connected with the preceding, is the fanatical struggle between the

Oriental monophysite and the Occidental Greek and Roman orthodox Christianity. And finally I may mention the Coptic revival in Egypt. All this concerned not merely the intellectuals of Syria and Egypt, but penetrated deep into the masses of the people. One of the symptoms of this revival of Orientalism was the re-Orientalization of the masses as regards language.

This antinomy was a vital factor in the history of the Eastern Roman Empire. It made easy the spectacular successes of Sassanian Persia and it helped Omar and his Arabs to establish their rule over a large part of the Byzantine Empire and to base it on a peculiar civilization akin to that of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt of late Roman times.

Here my story, as well as my competence and my time, comes to an end. But the antinomy of East and West, as once in these lands of Hellenistic occupation, is still alive today, in the same regions, shaping and transforming the history of our own time.